

## LAO TZU (LAO TSU)

Lao Tzu, also known as Laozi, Lao Tsu, Lao Tse, Lao Zi, Laotze or a number of other ways, is said to have lived in the sixth century BC according to Chinese tradition. However, recent scholars believe this is incorrect place the life of Lao Tzu in the fourth century BC.

Although little is known about the life of Lao Tzu, his cultural significance is important to the lives of generations of Chinese. According to Chinese tradition, Lao Tzu was born in Ku Prefecture of the Chū state, which today is named Lù yì County of the Henan province during the Spring and Autumn Period, roughly between 722 BC and 481 BC. Some legends state he was born with white hair, having spent more than eighty years in his mother's womb, giving him his title Laozi, which means "the old master".

According to tradition, and biography which includes Sima Quian's works, Lao Tzu was an elder contemporary of Confucius and worked as an archivist in the Imperial Library of the Zhou Dynasty. Confucius met Lao Tzu near modern Luoyang where he was going to study library scrolls. Over the next few months, the two discussed ritual and propriety, the cornerstones of Confucianism - Laozi strongly opposed Confucius's ideals.

Laozi, now eighty, quit his work and headed west on a water buffalo through the state of Qin, which is now Tibet, and disappeared into a vast desert. However, before his enter into the desert, Yin Xi (Yin Hsi), a guard at the western-most gate, Hank Pass, of the Great Wall convinced Lao Tzu to write down his wisdom. Laozi's response to the soldier was *Dao De Jing*, also spelled *Tao Te Ching*, which means "The Law of Virtue and Its Way".

Lao Tzu's work, *Tao Te Ching*, was a testament to his rationalism and beliefs. The work later led to the creation of both the philosophical Taoism and religious taoism, with the help of Chuang Tzu, which is most associated with harmony and leading a simple life. Taoism is best known for its tiajitu (commonly misnamed as Yin and Yang) and the bagua.

Laozi is traditionally regarded as the founder of Taoism. As a figure, he is intimately connected with the Tao Te Ching and "primordial", or "original", Taoism. Popular ("religious") Taoism typically presents the Jade Emperor as the official head deity. Intellectual ("elite") Taoists, such as the Celestial Masters sect, usually present Laozi (*Laojun*, "Lord Lao") and the Three Pure Ones at the top of the pantheon of deities.

*Tao* literally means "path" or "way", and can figuratively mean "essential nature", "destiny" "principle" or "true path". The philosophical and religious "Tao" is infinite, without limitation. One view states that the paradoxical opening is intended to prepare the reader for teachings about the unteachable Tao. Tao is believed to be transcendent, indistinct and without form. Hence, it cannot be named or categorized. Even the word "Tao" can be considered a dangerous temptation to make *Tao* a limiting "name".

The story of Laozi has taken on strong religious overtones since the Han dynasty. As Taoism took root, Laozi was recognized as a god. Belief in the revelation of the Dao from the divine Laozi resulted in the formation of the Way of the Celestial Master, the first organized religious Taoist sect. In later mature Taoist tradition, Laozi came to be seen as a personification of Dao. He is said to have undergone numerous "transformations", or taken on various guises in various incarnations throughout history to initiate the faithful in the Way. Religious Taoism also holds that the "Old Master" did not disappear after writing the Tao Te Ching, but rather traveled to India to reveal the Dao.

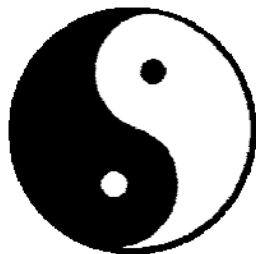
There are many popular accounts of Laozi's life, though facts and myths are impossible to separate regarding him. He is traditionally regarded as an older contemporary of Confucius, but modern scholarship places him centuries later or questions if he ever existed as an individual. An early account of his life was the biography by Sima Qian which seemed to some scholars incoherent but can not be disproved. Laozi is regarded as the author of the Dao De Jing, though there is a debate on the authorship.

In legends, he was conceived when his mother gazed upon a falling star. It is said that he stayed in the womb and matured for sixty-two years. He was born when his mother leaned against a plum tree. He emerged a grown man with a full grey beard and long earlobes, which are a sign of wisdom and long life.

According to popular biographies, he worked as the Keeper of the Archives for the royal court of Chou. This allowed him broad access to the works of the Yellow Emperor and other classics of the time. Laozi never opened a formal school. Nonetheless, he attracted a large number of students and loyal disciples. There are numerous variations of a story depicting Confucius consulting Laozi about rituals.

Laozi is said to have married and had a son named Tsung, who was a celebrated soldier. A large number of people trace their lineage back to Laozi, as the T'ang Dynasty did. Many, or all, of the lineages may be inaccurate. However, they are a testament to the impact of Laozi on Chinese culture.

Traditional accounts state that Laozi grew weary of the moral decay of the city and noted the kingdom's decline. At the age of 160, he ventured west to live as a hermit in the unsettled frontier. At the western gate of the city, or kingdom, he was recognized by a guard. The sentry asked the old master to produce a record of his wisdom. The resulting book is said to be the Tao Te Ching. In some versions of the tale, the sentry is so touched by the work that he leaves with Laozi to never be seen again. Some legends elaborate further that the "Old Master" was the teacher of the Buddha, or the Buddha himself.



A good traveler has no fixed plans, and is not intent on arriving.

A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves.

A scholar who cherishes the love of comfort is not fit to be deemed a scholar.

All difficult things have their origin in that which is easy, and great things in that which is small.

Ambition has one heel nailed in well, though she stretch her fingers to touch the heavens.

An ant on the move does more than a dozing ox.

Anticipate the difficult by managing the easy.

At the center of your being you have the answer; you know who you are and you know what you want.

Be Content with what you have; rejoice in the way things are. When you realize there is nothing lacking, the whole world belongs to you.

Be the chief but never the lord.

Because of a great love, one is courageous.

Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you courage.

By letting it go it all gets done. The world is won by those who let it go. But when you try and try. The world is beyond the winning.

Do the difficult things while they are easy and do the great things while they are small. A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.

Fill your bowl to the brim and it will spill. Keep sharpening your knife and it will blunt.